

As you read these selections, look for the rifts in these societies. Rifts are divides or fault lines along which tensions mount and conflicts arise. Every society has rifts — sometimes they are recognized; other times they are glossed over and denied. This chapter is partly an exercise in scrutinizing sources (all selections in the chapter are primary sources) to determine what is *not* said but implied. Note the disputes that the speech or document attempts to solve or ignore and the consensus that is assumed. In some cases, most obviously the racial divide in South Africa during the 1950s and 1960s, the rift is obvious and highlighted in the source. In others, the divisions are harder to pinpoint. We look for divisions for two reasons. First, understanding rifts tells us a great deal about a society. Recognizing a rift may not tell us how fragile a society is, but it does reveal what the society holds most important and where frictions are likely to develop. We might also be able to compare societies that have similar rifts (ethnic, racial, religious, political, economic, or social). Second, because rifts are the dynamic forces in a society, they show us how things are changing.

As you read these selections, you will be asked to think about the ways in which a people uses its history. Most of these sources, like so many others we could include, use historical accounts — explanations or stories of the past — to support their arguments. How can a historical account support a particular idea of the present or a vision of the future? What, after all, is the value of history?

Arab Opposition to a State of Israel

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the League of Nations gave Great Britain a mandate to administer the region known as Palestine. British rule was beset by, on one hand, pressure from the Zionist movement to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine and, on the other, pressure from Palestinian Arabs and neighboring Arab states to resist the Zionist demands. In the meantime, Zionist-inspired Jewish immigration to Palestine — mainly from Europe — continued and then increased with the rise of anti-Semitism

after Hitler's coming to power in Germany in 1933. As World War II ended, the situation in Palestine worsened: Both Zionist and Arab pressures intensified, with both sides resorting sometimes to violence. The horrendous experience of the Jewish people in Europe under Hitler's murderous rule naturally added to the difficulty of resolving the problem.

In November 1945 the United States and Great Britain established a commission to investigate the issue. This reading contains a portion of the Arab presentation to the commission. Why did Arabs oppose a Jewish state? What claims to Palestine did they make? Would they have accepted a nonreligious state that included Jews and Arabs? Was any compromise possible at this point? Why did the Arabs oppose the partition of Palestine?

Thinking Historically

What seems to have been the main conflict in Palestine at the time this document was written? Would you call it religious, economic, political, or something else? In what ways was this conflict likely to get worse, according to the Arab authors?

1. The whole Arab people is unalterably opposed to the attempt to impose Jewish immigration and settlement upon it, and ultimately to establish a Jewish State in Palestine. Its opposition is based primarily upon right. The Arabs of Palestine are descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the country, who have been in occupation of it since the beginning of history; they cannot agree that it is right to subject an indigenous population against its will to alien immigrants, whose claim is based upon a historical connection which ceased effectively many centuries ago. Moreover they form the majority of the population; as such they cannot submit to a policy of immigration which if pursued for long will turn them from a majority into a minority in an alien state; and they claim the democratic right of a majority to make its own decisions in matters of urgent national concern.
2. The entry of incessant waves of immigrants prevents normal economic and social development and causes constant dislocation of the country's life; in so far as it reacts upon prices and values and makes the whole economy dependent upon the constant inflow of capital from abroad it may even in certain circumstances lead to economic disaster. It is bound moreover to arouse continuous political unrest and prevent the establishment of that political stability on which the prosperity and health of the country depend. This unrest is likely to increase in frequency and violence as the Jews come nearer to being the majority and the Arabs a minority.

The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict, ed. Walter Langer and Barry Rubin (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995), 80, 82, 85, 88.

Even if economic and social equilibrium is reestablished, it will be to the detriment of the Arabs. The superior capital resources at the disposal of the Jews, their greater experience of modern economic technique, and the existence of a deliberate policy of expansion and domination have already gone far toward giving them the economic mastery of Palestine. The biggest concessionary companies are in their hands; they possess a large proportion of the total cultivable land, and an even larger one of the land in the highest category of fertility; and the land they possess is mostly inalienable to non-Jews. The continuance of land-purchase and immigration, taken together with the refusal of Jews to employ Arabs on their lands or in their enterprises and the great increase in the Arab population, will create a situation in which the Arab population is pushed to the margin of cultivation and a landless proletariat, rural and urban, comes into existence. This evil can be palliated but not cured by attempts at increasing the absorptive capacity or the industrial production of Palestine; the possibility of such improvements is limited, they would take a long time to carry out, and would scarcely do more than keep pace with the rapid growth of the Arab population; moreover in present circumstances they would be used primarily for the benefit of the Jews and thus might increase the disparity between the two communities.

Nor is the evil economic only. Zionism is essentially a political movement, aiming at the creation of a state: immigration, land-purchase, and economic expansion are only aspects of a general political strategy. If Zionism succeeds in its aim, the Arabs will become a minority in their own country; a minority which can hope for no more than a minor share in the government, for the state is to be a Jewish state, and which will find itself not only deprived of that international status which the other Arab countries possess but cut off from living contact with the Arab world of which it is an integral part. . . .

8. In the Arab view, any solution of the problem created by Zionist aspirations must satisfy certain conditions:

- (i) It must recognize the right of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine to continue in occupation of the country and to preserve its traditional character.
- (ii) It must recognize that questions like immigration, which affect the whole nature and destiny of the country, should be decided in accordance with democratic principles by the will of the population.
- (iii) It must accept the principle that the only way by which the will of the population can be expressed is through the establishment of responsible representative Government. (The Arabs find something inconsistent in the attitude of Zionists who demand the establishment of a free democratic commonwealth in Palestine and then hasten to add that this should not take place until the Jews are in a majority.)

(iv) This representative Government should be based upon the principle of absolute equality of all citizens irrespective of race and religion.

(v) The form of Government should be such as to make possible the development of a spirit of loyalty and cohesion among all elements of the community, which will override all sectional attachments. In other words it should be a Government which the whole community could regard as their own, which should be rooted in their consent and have a moral claim upon their obedience.

(vi) The settlement should recognize the fact that by geography and history Palestine is inescapably part of the Arab world; that the only alternative to its being part of the Arab world and accepting the implications of its position is complete isolation, which would be disastrous from every point of view; and that whether they like it or not the Jews in Palestine are dependent upon the goodwill of the Arabs.

(vii) The settlement should be such as to make possible a satisfactory definition within the framework of U.N.O. of the relations between Palestine and the Western Powers who possess interests in the country.

(viii) The settlement should take into account that Zionism is essentially a political movement aiming at the creation of a Jewish state and should therefore avoid making any concession which might encourage Zionists in the hope that this aim can be achieved in any circumstances. . . .

The idea of partition and the establishment of a Jewish state in a part of Palestine is inadmissible for the same reasons of principle as the idea of establishing a Jewish state in the whole country. If it is unjust to the Arabs to impose a Jewish state on the whole of Palestine, it is equally unjust to impose it in any part of the country. Moreover, as the Woodhead Commission showed, there are grave practical difficulties in the way of partition; commerce would be strangled, communities dislocated, and the public finances upset. It would also be impossible to devise frontiers which did not leave a large Arab minority in the Jewish state. This minority would not willingly accept its subjection to the Zionists, and it would not allow itself to be transferred to the Arab state. Moreover, partition would not satisfy the Zionists. It cannot be too often repeated that Zionism is a political movement aiming at the domination at least of the whole of Palestine; to give it a foothold in part of Palestine would be to encourage it to press for more and to provide it with a base for its activities. Because of this, because of the pressure of population, and in order to escape from its isolation it would inevitably be thrown into enmity with the surrounding Arab states and this enmity would disturb the stability of the whole Middle East.